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In the Claims

1. (Currently Amended) A method to permit indefinite use of an inactivated option resident on a medical device comprising the steps of:

receiving, at a centralized facility, a request from a user for indefinite use of an option resident on a medical device located remotely from the centralized facility;

determining whether to grant indefinite use of the option in response to the request based on whether a set of criteria has been satisfied, including whether the customer is qualified to use the medical device;

generating an activation key configured to permit indefinite use of the option in response to an indefinite use grant;

transmitting the activation key from the centralized facility to the device; and
automatically enabling user access to the option resident on the device in response to reception of the activation key; and

periodically monitoring whether the customer continues to be qualified for the medical device.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the activation key is an alphanumeric identification code.

3. (Original) The method of claim 2 wherein the activation key is self-executing to automatically enable the option and further comprises the step of writing the alphanumeric identification code to memory of the device.

4. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of granting indefinite access to the option resident in memory of a medical imaging device.

5. (Original) The method of claim 1 comprising the step of determining satisfaction of the set of criteria including:

validating a user identifier;

validating a system identifier;

determining an option identifier; and

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determining an indefinite use request identifier.

6. (Original) The method of claim 5 further comprising the step of denying the request for indefinite use if the user identifier is invalid.

7. (Original) The method of claim 5 further comprising the step of denying the request for indefinite use if the system identifier is invalid.

8. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising the steps of:
generating a status of a customer;
denying the request if the customer status is unqualified; and
granting the request if the customer status is qualified.

9. (Original) The method of claim 8 wherein an unqualified customer status includes one of a delinquent account, an exhausted line of credit, a poor credit history, and incomplete educational requirements.

10. (Original) The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of generating an alphanumeric key specific to at least one of a user identifier, a system identifier, an indefinite user identifier, and an option identifier.

11. (Currently Amended) A system to grant recurrent use of inactivated options comprising:

a device having at least one inactivated software application resident on a computer programmed to control an option of the device;

a receiving center remotely located from the device configured to:

receive a request from a user for recurrent use of the at least one inactivated software application resident on the computer;

transmit an access code from the receiving center to the device; and

directly responsive to receipt of the access code, enable recurrent use of
the at least one inactivated software application resident on the device.

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12. (Original) The system of claim 11 further comprising a processor within the receiving center programmed to:

receive a user identifier and validate the user identification;

if the user identification is validated, receive a system identifier and validate the system identifier;

if the system identifier is validated, grant recurrent use to the at least one inactivated software application; and

notify the user that recurrent use of the at least one inactivated software application is granted.

13. (Original) The system of claim 11 wherein the access code granting recurrent use is transmitted through one of a private communication system and a public communication system.

14. (Original) The system of claim 11 wherein the at least one computer receives the request through an open communication system and is further programmed to generate an alphanumeric key specific to at least one of a user identifier, a system identifier, a recurrent use identifier, and a software application identifier.

15. (Original) The system of claim 12 wherein the computer within the receiving center is further programmed to:

determine if a software application upgrade is available for the at least one software application for which recurrent use has been requested; and

notify the user of the availability to upgrade the requested software application.

16. (Original) The system of claim 11 wherein the device includes at least one medical imaging device.

17. (Original) The system of claim 11 wherein the receiving center is further configured to:

determine whether a set of criteria has been met, and if so;

grant access to the at least one inactivated software application, and if

not;

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deny access to the at least one inactivated software application.

18. (Currently Amended) A computer program having a set of instructions, which when executed by a computer, causes the computer to:

receive a user identifier;

validate the user identifier at the processing station;

receive a request from a user to recurrently use a software application resident in memory of a medical device, wherein the medical device is connected to a processing station via a public communication channel;

receive a system identifier;

validate the system identifier at the processing station;

determine user qualification, and if the user is qualified:

generate an electronic enabler;

transmit the electronic enabler to the device; and

grant recurrent use of the software application.

19. (Original) The computer program of claim 18 wherein, after receiving the request, the computer program further causes the computer to:

identify a user identifier;

validate the user identifier;

generate a user status;

deny the request for an unfavorable user status; and

grant the request for a favorable user status.

20. (Original) The computer program of claim 18 further causing the computer to: generate an alphanumeric software key specific to the system identifier, and transmit the alphanumeric software key to the device over a private communication system.

21. (Original) The computer program of claim 19 further causing the computer to: periodically monitor user status; and if the user status is one of unfavorable and unqualified, prohibit recurrent use of the software application.

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22. (Currently Amended) A computer data signal embodied in a carrier wave and representing a sequence of instructions which, when executed by at least one processor, causes the at least one processor to:

accept, at a centralized facility, a request from a customer for recurrent use of an option of a medical imaging device located remotely from the centralized facility;

determine whether the medical imaging device is capable of supporting the option requested;

determine whether the customer is qualified, and if so:

generate an activation signal designed to allow recurrent use of the option;

transmit the activation signal from the centralized facility to the medical imaging device; and

permit the customer recurrent use of the option.

23. (Currently Amended) The computer data signal of claim 22 wherein the option includes software applications resident in memory of ~~a~~ the medical imaging device.

24. (Original) The computer data signal of claim 23 wherein the activation signal is a software identification key generated at the centralized facility and electronically transmitted to the device to grant access to a software application resident on the device, wherein the software identification key is self-executing.

25. (Original) The computer data signal of claim 22 wherein the sequence of instructions further causes the processor to:

periodically determine whether the customer is qualified, and if the customer has an unqualified user status:

notify the customer of the unqualified customer status; and

deactivate recurrent use of the option.

26. (Original) The computer data signal of claim 25 wherein the unqualified customer status includes one of a delinquent billing account, a lack of a line of credit, an inadequate credit history, and a failure to complete training requirements.

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27. (Original) The computer data signal of claim 22 wherein a qualified customer includes a customer having a non-delinquent billing account.

28. (New) The method of claim 1 further comprising disabling the option upon determining that the set of criteria is unsatisfied.